

Arson suspected in Alabama church fires

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Arson suspected in Alabama church fires

By Hannah Elliott & Robert Marus

Associated Baptist Press

CENTREVILLE, Ala. (ABP)—Federal officials suspect arson in a series of fires that damaged or destroyed five small Baptist churches in rural Bibb County, Ala., the night of Feb. 2-3.

In addition, a sixth church in neighboring Chilton County burned the same night, but church representatives said it may have been due to an accident.

Investigators from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms joined state and local authorities the morning of Feb. 3 to determine the cause of fires that “were set as fast as they could drive from one location to the next,” Bibb County Deputy Sheriff Kenneth Weems told the Associated Press.

The five Bibb County churches were all located near U.S. Highway 82 and the blazes began within about three hours of each other, news reports said. The area is located about 50 miles southwest of Birmingham.

The fires completely destroyed Ashby Baptist Church in Brierfield, Rehobeth Baptist Church in Randolph and Pleasant Sabine Baptist Church

near Centreville. The other two churches, Old Union Baptist in Brierfield and Antioch Baptist in Antioch, sustained damage but escaped complete destruction.

All of the churches but Pleasant Sabine belonged to the Southern Baptist Convention, the statewide Alabama Baptist Convention and the local Bibb County Baptist Association.

No one was injured in any of the fires. But they called to mind a rash of arsons—many of them racially motivated—that destroyed dozens of African-American churches across the South in the late 1990s. Several of those crimes remain unsolved.

Four of the Bibb County churches were home to predominantly white congregations, while the Pleasant Sabine church is historically African-American.

David Hand, pastor of Old Union Baptist Church, said the community remains in disbelief. “Our congregation is pretty upset, but we are also thankful, because others lost a lot more than we did,” he said.

Hand said Old Union’s damage resulted from two separate fires. The damaged areas include the pulpit, communion table, the American flag and the carpeting surrounding those areas.

The suspected arsonists also kicked in the back door according to Hand—which officials said was a common thread between several of the fires.

“There is a lot of sadness around the area, but we are all pulling together,” he said.

Alabama Baptist Convention Executive Director Rick Lance released a statement saying the group was responding in multiple ways to the fires.

“We’re working with the leadership of the Bibb Baptist Association to provide prayer support and damage assessment for these churches,” he said. “As quickly as possible, we anticipate having mobile chapels available for use by the two churches whose facilities were destroyed.

He also said the state convention would provide “appropriate financial assistance” to the convention-affiliated churches damaged. All of the churches have small congregations and budgets.

As of press time, police had made no arrests nor released the names of any suspects. Alabama lawmakers have offered a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the arsonists.

The Alabama Baptist contributed to this story

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.

Jeanie Miley: Sugar Daddy or Redeemer?

February 24, 2006

Posted: 2/10/06

CYBER COLUMN: Sugar Daddy or Redeemer?

By Jeanie Miley

Driving down one of the major streets in my city, I nearly swerved over into the other lane when I saw the billboard on a church building.

“God is not your sugar daddy,” the sign proclaimed, and I laughed aloud.

“No kidding!” I thought, making a mental note to relay that wise quip to friends who struggle with me about how best to communicate and live the gospel challenge.

Jeanie Miley

There’s nothing in the biblical revelation that seduces anyone into thinking that God might fulfill the road of sugar daddy or cosmic bellhop.

I go back and read about Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness, and I am comforted and strengthened over and over again by the knowledge that even Jesus, God Incarnate, struggled mightily with what kind of Messiah he would be.

Sometimes, I am astonished all over again by the vulnerability and transparency of Jesus. Even after all these years of studying and teaching the gospel narratives, I get goosebumps when I really think about the fact that the Son of God revealed his struggles in the wilderness and in Gethsemane to his close friends. What kind of God is that?

It is staggering to me to know that Jesus could have wielded all kinds of power over others but chose, instead, to be self-limiting and take the path of integrity and love. It never ceases to amaze me that Jesus could have

drawn even bigger crowds by making the focus of his ministry the meeting of peoples' immediate physical needs but chose to save them and set them free.

I study the life of Jesus—the events and encounters, the teachings and the miracles—to seek and to find the light I need to take the next step in my own life, and sometimes, when I'm wrestling with a decision of my own, I remember the standard Jesus set for us when he stood up to the temptations of instant gratification, the quick buzz and worldly control and power, and chose to be the kind of messiah who would heal and liberate human beings, transforming and empowering them.

It seems pretty clear to me that the body of Christ on earth, the church, has to take trips to the wilderness now and then, as well, to wrestle with what kind of church it is going to be. Like Jesus in the wilderness, the church and churches face the same kinds of temptations in shaping the ministries and activities of the contemporary church in a contemporary culture.

Our minds have been trained for sound bites, and we have learned to have short attention spans. We crave to be entertained with sensory stimulation, and when it is thrilling, we want more of it next time. We are a culture with many addictions, and, according to people who observe cultural trends, narcissism and self-absorption are growing by leaps and bounds.

And so it is that we who love and serve and plan the programs of the church must continue to ask ourselves if we are addressing the problems of our culture and helping people become whole and mature, or if we are, in fact, colluding with the culture to keep people immature.

We who love the church must keep on going into the wilderness and putting our programs to the tests that Jesus faced and make the hard decisions to be about the work of Christ, as the body of Christ.

You can't have it both ways. The One we worship can't be a sugar daddy if

he's going to be Redeemer.

Jeanie Miley is an author and columnist and a retreat and workshop leader. She is married to Martus Miley, pastor of River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston, and they have three adult daughters. Got feedback? Write her at Writer2530@aol.com.

Cybercolumn by Brett Younger: Forgiveness at the Holiday Inn Express

February 24, 2006

Posted: 2/24/06

CYBER COLUMN: Forgiveness at the Holiday Inn Express

By Brett Younger

Not long ago, we traveled down to Houston for Carol's grandmother's 100th birthday. The party was at the nursing home from 1:30 to 3:30. We had to stop so they could serve supper. We stayed at a fancy two-star hotel that night. About 8:00, Carol was talking to her parents and our children were watching a game on television, so I decided to find a quiet place to

read Dietrich Bonhoeffer. When I walked into the lobby, the woman behind the desk—she looked about 20—said, “Can I help you?”

“I’m just looking for a quiet place to read.”

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 5: Replace despair over circumstances with faith

February 24, 2006

Posted: 2/23/06

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 5

Replace despair over circumstances with faith

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By Joseph Matos

Family Bible Series for March 5: Christ demands top priority in a Christian's life

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Posted: 2/23/06

Family Bible Series for March 5

Christ demands top priority in a Christian's life

• Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-33

By Greg Ammons

Explore the Bible Series for March 5: Knowledge of Christ influences relationships

February 24, 2006

Posted: 2/23/06

Explore the Bible Series for March 5

Knowledge of Christ influences relationships

• *Isaiah 1:1-4:6*

By James Adair

Baptist University of the Americas, San Antonio

What Christians believe has been the center of debate and controversy from the first century to the present day. Should Gentile converts be circumcised? Did the divine Christ descend on the human Jesus at baptism? Was Christ “of the same nature” as God the Father? Does Christ have two natures (divine and human) or one (divine-human)? Does the bishop of Rome have authority over other sees? Are the body and blood of Christ literally present in the eucharist? Which has greater authority, the Bible or the traditions of the church? Does God call women to positions of leadership within the church?



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Church makes community interaction a fine art_122203

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Posted: 12/19/03

Church makes community interaction a fine art

EAGLE LAKE-A small Texas Baptist church became an art gallery for a day this fall, as church members sought to help their community connect the dots between faith and art.



Artists
involved
with the
Art & Soul
event at
First
Baptist
Church of
Eagle
Lake
included
Jessica
Thacker,
Margo
Harrison,
Tony Tyler
and
Sandra
Benge The
group is
shown
Pastor
Chris
Thacker
and
Tyler's
sculpture,
"The
Dance."

Following the lead of a successful similar event in 2001, members of First Baptist Church of Eagle Lake hosted "Art & Soul: A Celebration of Faith

and Art.”

Church members Margo Harrison and Sandra Benge coordinated the Sunday afternoon event. They began contacting local artists, encouraging them to share their works with the community and informing them that each piece would be displayed gallery-style in the church's Fellowship Hall.

NAMB outsourcing raises conflict of interest question

February 24, 2006

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NAMB outsourcing raises conflict of interest question

By Joe Westbury & Greg Warner

Christian Index & Associated Baptist Press

ATLANTA (ABP)—Steve Sanford, a paid consultant who advised the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board to outsource most of its media operations, has been hired to provide many of those outsourced services by his longtime friend, NAMB President Bob Reccord.

Mission board officials declined to say if the arrangement poses a conflict of interest. But spokesman Marty King said, “I understand why people

would ask about that.”

Blended family

February 24, 2006

Posted: 2/17/06

Blended family

By Russ Dilday

Buckner Benevolences

MESQUITE—Between bites of cereal and swigs of juice at the breakfast table, the Moers family’s three children seem to be talking at once. Mom prepares food, while the two sisters lean on each other, playing with each other’s hair. Dad sips coffee and answers a deluge of questions from the middle child, a son.

Christine
Moers serves
breakfast to
her children,
Andrew,
McKenzie and
Precious,
whom she and
her husband
Michael
adopted
through
Buckner
Adoption and
Maternity
Services.
Photos by Russ
Dilday/Buckner
Benevolences

The youngest daughter stands out among the other family members not just because she's the only African-American in a family of fair-skinned blonds, but also because of her smile, charm and distinctive name—Precious.

New Air Force guidelines get mixed reviews

February 24, 2006

Posted: 2/21/06

New Air Force guidelines get mixed reviews

By Robert Marus

ABP Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Pentagon officials have revised a set of guidelines on religious freedom in the Air Force after complaints from members of Congress and some religious groups.

But the revisions met with mixed reviews from groups with interests in the struggle over religion in the armed services.

Evangelicals conflicted over global warming stand

February 24, 2006

Posted: 2/21/06

Evangelicals conflicted over global warming stand

By **Robert Marus**

ABP Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Conflict may be heating up between two groups of evangelical Christian leaders over the issue of global warming.

At stake are the hearts and minds of evangelical Americans and the politicians who listen to them—not to mention the future of the planet.

Buckner Seeks African-American Families to Host Black Orphans from Russia

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Buckner Seeks African-American Families to Host Black Orphans from

Russia

Buckner Orphan Care International, a subsidiary of the 127-year-old Buckner Benevolences in Dallas, is seeking African-American families from the Christian community to host two black orphans from Russia this summer. The children will spend two weeks in the metroplex in June with Buckner Angels from Abroad.

	
Jennifer	Marisa

Launched in 2004, Buckner Angels from Abroad allows adoption-minded families the opportunity to host orphaned children ages 6-12 when they visit the United States during their two-week summer vacation. For the first time, this year's Angels contingent will include two black orphan sisters from Orphanage No. 9 and Veritsa Orphanage in St. Petersburg, Russia. Jennifer and Marisa are 8 and 9 years old, respectively, and represent Russia's small black orphan population who-according to orphanage directors-are predestined to a life of prostitution, crime and early death due to their underclass standing in a largely monochromatic, post-communist society.

The Angels will stay in host family homes during their visit to Dallas and will participate in several Buckner-organized events, including a family picnic, Vacation Bible School, cultural and recreational excursions and a

swim party. In addition, host families may plan their own activities around the schedule of events. Buckner staff will be in daily contact with each host family to lend support and guidance as needed. In addition, interpreters will be available to assist families with communication.

Interested families are required to attend an information workshop on Saturday, March 4 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco. The host family application deadline is March 31.